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RELIGION AND MORALITY.

HENRY W. WRIGHT.

IN a former number of this periodical, I presented a view of moral development as a progressive organization of conduct.¹ This organization is effected through the instrumentality of *volition*, the central activity of self-conscious personality. In all its forms, from the simple impulse to choice after deliberation, volition is an organizing agency. Now the universal conditions of human life require all men to make certain adjustments in the organization of their conduct. Of these fundamental conditions, the first is the possession, by all men in common, of a set of natural impulses inherited from animal progenitors. These impulses must be harmonized and correlated as the first step in self-organization. The result of this primary adjustment is the development of individuality and a definite self-interest. A second condition essential to all human life is that of social relationship. Every human being is born into the society of his fellows, and becomes conscious of self only as he becomes conscious of others also. The organization of conduct requires, therefore, as the second step in its progress, the adjustment of individual interest, which is narrow and self-centered, to the larger welfare of society. These two adjustments, when perfectly achieved, complete the organization of human conduct as far as man's natural and social life is concerned.

There is, however, a third condition essential to the life of man, not mentioned in the previous article, because to consider it carries one out of the sphere of morality proper. It is the presence in human life of *universal reality*. This condition necessitates a third adjustment,

¹ "Evolution and Ethical Method," INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, October, 1905, p. 59.

the adjustment of man to the universe, the integration of universal reality within the life of the human self. This, the final step in the organization of conduct, is an affair of religion rather than of morality. The conception of religion which it suggests is not unfamiliar,—in fact it is most common at present, although differently expressed by different thinkers, according to each one's philosophical bias, as the 'final synthesis of subject and object,' or the 'feeling of harmony between ourselves and the universe,' or a 'faith in the ultimate conservation of values.' But when understood in connection with the theory of moral development just outlined, this conception of religion as an adjustment of man to the universe is illuminating, both as to the development of the religious consciousness and the relation of religion and morality.

If we thus regard religion as the final step in self-organization, it is possible to distinguish three necessary stages in its evolution, and also to show why these three stages are directly dependent for their specific character upon the degree of moral development attained by the self. The first two adjustments, which belong properly to the field of morality, are logically prior to that of religion; since the final adjustment of the self to the universe can be attained only when its capacities have been fully realized in its natural and social environment. But notwithstanding the fact that such a relation of dependence exists between them, these different steps in the process of self-realization do not occur in strict temporal sequence. Thus religion does not delay its appearance until moral development is complete and the individual thoroughly socialized. We find the religious adjustment attempted in the lowest stage of human culture. The universe presses in upon the individual and forces him to take toward it some attitude. It is inevitable that the attitude taken should vary with the character of the self. The form of belief required to adjust man and the universe, will depend upon the needs and aspirations of the

human self and the view taken of the universe. Thus religion while distinct from morality is still dependent on it, and its successive stages are determined by the successive epochs in moral development.

At the lowest stage the self consists of a medley of different impulses, unregulated except by those customs which have grown up as conditions of social survival, and whose significance is not understood by those who obey them. Anything like a controlling aim or life-purpose is entirely absent from the consciousness of the self at this stage. The universe is regarded as an aggregate of objects or agencies capable of ministering to the desires of man or of inflicting upon him dire calamities. Religion at this stage takes the form of belief in divinities which, in response to human appeal, have power to influence the objects and forces of nature so that they may minister to human needs. As there are many impulses and many objects, so there are many gods. Each main source of food-supply has its divinity, so have springs and wells. There is a god of the chase and one who controls procreation. The leading attribute of deity at this stage is *Power*. This power is neither exclusively physical nor mental but something of both, the two not being clearly distinguished. The worship of such divinities takes the form of an endeavor to placate them by offering and sacrifice. They are assumed to have the same desires as man, and their favor is sought by gifts of food and drink. Within this stage fall the various forms of religion usually regarded as primitive, from animism, through the different forms of nature-worship, to polytheism.

In the second stage we find the self in possession of a well-developed individuality, the result of subordinating the many conflicting impulses to a few controlling aims and ambitions which represent the interest of the self as a unit. The universe is consequently looked upon as a factor influencing the fortunes of the individual. The form of religion here needed to adjust individual interest and the universal order, is belief in a power able to

guarantee to the individual who fulfills certain stated conditions, the realization of his own ambitions. Hence the tendency at this stage is to conceive of God as a conscious individual in whom the attribute of *Justice* is added to the power possessed by divinities of an earlier stage. He is regarded as one who rewards or punishes man according to his deserts. As the human individual has his own interests and ambitions, so God is believed to have his own designs and purposes. These are expressed in laws and decrees supernaturally revealed. The man who obeys these divine laws is rewarded with happiness and the fulfillment of his ambition, while he who disobeys is punished by misery and deprivation; for God is not only Legislator but Judge of all the world. The reward of those who obey the divine commands is first supposed to come within the limits of earthly existence. But experience proving that fortune does not discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving in this present world, the reward of the individual who serves God and hence deserves his favor is postponed to a future life. This stage includes types of religion from organized polytheism through henotheism to monotheism,—at least such monotheism as makes God sharply individual and separate from the world.

Finally, in the third place, we have the social or ideal self more or less fully developed, as the result of the adjustment of individual interest to the welfare of society. Man seeks to realize now, not narrow self-centered ambitions which are different from, and opposed to, the good of others, but those larger ends which embrace the well-being of humanity. He looks upon the universe, not as deciding his fortunes as an individual, but as determining the destiny of man and the reality of those ideals, social and intellectual, which are being slowly and painfully realized in the course of human progress. The kind of belief required to adjust the individual, thus socialized, to the universe, is faith in the existence of a universal principle of such character as to conserve the highest

human welfare and guarantee the reality of those values to which man attributes supreme worth. Now man, at this height of his moral development, regards the complete social life,—the recognition of brotherhood, the feeling of sympathy, and the practice of coöperation,—as the object of supreme worth in human life. Hence the religion that gives reality to those values which man holds highest, is one which finds the nature of God, the universal principle, most completely expressed, not in power, nor in justice, but in *Benevolence*. Faith in such a God, who is the expression of infinite benevolence, gives to those altruistic qualities and habits which the social life demands, a foundation deep in the nature of reality. The individual who sacrifices health and possessions and even, in extreme cases, physical existence itself, in the service of others, receives from such a faith the assurance that he has not lost but gained reality thereby; for such a life approaches most nearly to the Absolutely Real. At this, the culminating stage in the evolution of the religious consciousness, man adjusts himself to the universe, not by sacrifice offered to win the favor of a capricious divinity, nor by obedience to a law externally imposed by a deity who has his own ends to attain, but by faithfully discharging his duties in society and devoting his life to the service of his fellow-beings. Thus the claims of religion and morality are brought into perfect harmony, and man, by the performance of earthly duty, identifies himself with Universal Reality. This final form of religion may be called theism (if we contrast theism with deism), or, as has been suggested, spiritual pantheism.

It is interesting to note in conclusion that while the form of the religious consciousness is normally determined by the degree of moral development, occasionally their positions may be reversed and religion may serve to direct and determine the course of moral development. This occurs when a people, occupying a certain level of moral development, have brought to them, from the outside, a form of religion appropriate to a higher level. In

such cases the religion may act as a potent force of moral uplift, drawing the native morality up to its own plane. This effect would be produced if a people living the life of natural impulse, partially regulated by custom, should be taught to believe in a God of justice, who rewards and punishes according to individual desert. Such religion would lead the people in question to look into the future and consider consequences, thus hastening the organization of their lives by comprehensive purposes and controlling aims. It is doubtful if this salutary effect would follow, however, if the religion and the morality were too widely separated in degree of development. Thus a people living the life of natural impulse could hardly grasp the true significance of a God of benevolence. They must inevitably translate this benevolence into terms of kindly—but unregulated—impulse, and their attitude toward such a deity would not be essentially different from their attitude toward the divinities previously worshiped.

Probably religion performs its most signal service, however, when an individual who is self-centered in his interests, is brought to believe in a God of benevolence. The mental outlook of such an individual is totally changed, and the comparative values which attach to things completely reversed. Greater reality is seen to attach, not to the narrow considerations of selfish ambitions, but to the broader concerns of human welfare. Thus he is encouraged to devote his life to disinterested social service.

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